

Report on Voters Without Borders Launch Event – 1 September 2020

The European Citizen's Initiative Voters Without Borders was officially launched on 1 September with a two-hour event at Press Club Brussels Europe. The event was open to registered participants and was livestreamed on the YouTube channel of the Press Club, where the full video can now be found.

After a welcome coffee, Anna Comacchio, a representative of the Initiative presented the numbers and reasons for the project, as well as the young team that is working hard towards its success.



Speeches from other members of the Team followed. The importance was stressed to preserve democracy through both top-down and bottom-up synergic action, especially in times when such fundamental value seems to be threatened in different parts of Europe. A big step towards quality European democracy would be tying

voting rights to European rather than national citizenship.

Three central points of the Initiative include the possibility for mobile citizens to choose whether they want to vote in the country of origin or of residence; automatic registration to make easier for them to appear on electoral rolls; and coordination to avoid double voting. In addition, their right to vote in regional and national elections in the country of residence is advocated for and should be seen as a completion of the freedom of movement. To support the proposal, Voters Without Borders suggests setting up a Help Desk for mobile voters, as well as paving the way for more e-voting opportunities to increase political participation.

A panel discussion with Alberto Alemanno (founder of *The Good Lobby*), MEP Karen Melchior (Renew Europe), and Bogdan Deleanu (MEP Dragoș Pîslaru's head of cabinet) followed.

Alemanno, one of seven members of the ECI Citizens' Committee, described the Initiative as a clear demand to European Institutions to take into account the most tangible outcome of EU integration: the existence of 17 million citizens living across borders, who currently do not have a say on policies that affect them on a daily basis. Since every EU citizen can enjoy the freedom of movement within the Union, each of us could eventually face these voting limitations. Synergy – not rivalry – between

representative and participatory democracy are fundamental to make an innovative change. In addition, the genuine nature of this project led by a team of “young, committed citizens who really believe in the importance of fostering full political rights all across the EU” was stressed.

MEP Karen Melchior reported the frustrating situation of Danish citizens abroad: a strict interpretation of their home country’s Constitution prevents them from voting in any elections in Denmark once they have moved abroad. According to Melchior, creating a strong network of European citizens is fundamental in order to have an impact and to eventually have better representation amongst the people that have influence on our lives. Only then can European democracy be a living one, one to be really proud of.



Deleanu linked voting rights to the right of education, healthcare and social security, among others. As mobile citizens come in and contribute to the society of their country of residence, they should be granted the same rights as nationals of that country. Denying such rights creates a rift between them and their local community, leading to issues with integration. In order to make the initiative work, he suggests keeping the issue high in the public debate, drawing attention from MEPs, political spheres, as well as from the wider public.

Attendees of the launch, on-site and online, were given the opportunity to intervene throughout the event. Olivia ten Horn of Volt Belgium reiterated that we are a large community of “17 million and growing”. Cross-border city council representative Núria Bordes Castells of Woluwe-Saint-Lambert provided a testimonial of her election in Belgium as a Spanish national. She drew attention to the difference between the right to vote and the choice to vote, both hard to reach when living in another country.

Giorgio Clarotti’s (Alliance for Europe) intervention provided advice as well as testimonials of past campaigns. He suggested being inventive on social media, such as contacting “influencers”, in order to reach as many people as possible. Concerns among mobile citizens were also pointed out: sometimes, their lack of trust in national institutions is the reason why they do not take advantage of

the few voting rights they already have. His discussion also allowed the Team to express the willingness to team up with similar initiatives, from Institutions as well as from any civil society reality, aimed at enhancing voting rights.



Virginia Fiume of Eumans! said “there’s a fascinating wave in how ECIs are being used”, a wave that reflects a political reform going on. Since the Europe we live in is one of mobility, we now belong to something ahead of nation-states. ECIs are thus a way for cross-border civil society to tackle common problems and make democracy finally work.

Towards the conclusion, ECIT founder and Voters Without Borders strategist Tony Venables reported a message of support from Alain Lamassoure, “father” of European Citizen’s Initiatives in the Convention on the Future of Europe. ECIs were conceived as an instrument for genuine citizens, not big lobbies. Today’s structural problem is that democracy is often taken for granted, thus few people really understand the need to improve it.

In his final plea, Alberto Alemanno highlighted the importance for the Initiative to be supported by an European Parliament’s initiative to change electoral law in the Union. This would be in line with the cooperation between representative and participatory democracy Voters Without Borders is striving to put into practice.

The event was closed by Voters Without Borders’s Claire Dautcourt, who explained the “pyramid system” adopted to reach 1 million signatures. If every signatory convinces four other people to sign, and each of those four convince another four, and so on, the petition will go viral and this impressive amount will be reached more easily.

In the afternoon following the launch event, the Team was in front of the European Parliament to spread the word of the Initiative among MEPs, civil servants, and other citizens. The Initiative can be signed on the website of the European Commission (scan the QR code to open the web address or click on the link below). Follow Voters Without Borders on social media and subscribe to the newsletter to stay updated on future events. The Team is always welcome to extend the supporting coalition to like-minded organizations.



<https://eci.ec.europa.eu/013/public/#/screen/home>

